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Senka Božić-Vrbančić i Mario Vrbančić: Captain Euro: Time, Space and Imperial Power

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## CAPTAIN EURO: TIME, SPACE AND IMPERIAL POWER

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*Captain Euro is a comic superhero created in 1999 by “Twelve Stars Corporate Vision Strategists”, a U.K.-based company known for promoting the European Parliament and the European Commission in the 1990s. A key purpose of this essay is to provide some insights into the ways in which popular culture operates in the European Union in order to contribute to the construction of a European supranational identity.*

**Key words:** *European supranational identity, popular culture, comic superheroes, ideological fantasy of imperialism, time and space*

Captain Euro is a fictional character, a comic superhero, whose job is to save Europe from all evils and wrongs.<sup>1</sup> He is a pillar of a new emerging superpower – the fortress Europe. He is equipped with Europe’s latest technology and supported by an excellent team. Captain Euro dresses in a costume adorned with the elements of the European Union flag. His patriotic costume resembles another, largely forgotten, patriotic superhero, Captain America, whose mission was to save America during the Second World War. Both captains “uphold” the broad values of the societies they protect and present themselves as resisting the powers of evil and wrongdoing in the world. Captain Euro’s archenemy is Dr. D. Vider. He is the head of an evil team, an evil organisation that aims to cripple Europe’s social body, to divide the European Union, and then, from the EU fragments, create its own empire – an evil empire. Captain Euro and Dr. D. Vider chase each

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<sup>1</sup> Captain Euro website: <http://www.captaineuro.com/> (18 February 2011).

other over the continent, tussling over works of art, fighting over the future of Venice and other icons of European identity. In order for adventure to develop, the struggle must transcend European space; hence, Captain Euro fights the enemies of European values – such as democracy, justice, tolerance, and open-mindedness – all over the world; in other words, he represents a global super power.

Captain Euro is not a product of a zealous enthusiast, as, for example, was the comic character Superman, created in the 1930s. He is not just a comic book hero; he is a brand. He was created in 1999 when the decision to adopt the “euro” was made.<sup>2</sup> Commissioned to create Captain Euro was the private company “Twelve Stars Corporate Vision Strategists”, based in Britain. It was known for promoting some of the world’s largest companies (Philip Morris, Heineken ...) and, in the 1990s, for its work with the European Parliament and the European Commission. Captain Euro has been applied to anything “from T-shirts and stationery, to comic books and video games”.<sup>3</sup> The comic books were launched at a press conference chaired by a European official and endorsed by the President of the European Parliament, who introduced Captain Euro as a new celebrity character. And, of course, like any celebrity, Captain Euro, raised major media interest, not just in Europe but also internationally, from Japan to the U.S.A. As acknowledged on his website, he has appeared on many television and radio programmes, as well as in newspapers and magazines – making it on to the cover several times. A Euro mascot based on his character has been used by television networks in programmes relating to the euro currency (BBC and BBC World, RTL Germany, REUTERS Worldwide, CNBC Europe, KNET Belgium, FUJI TV Japan, CNN, Channel 4, and more...).

In this essay, through the analysis of this fictional character we explore the role of popular culture in the process of constructing a European<sup>4</sup> supranational identity. Rather than seeing the Captain Euro project as

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<sup>2</sup> The decision to adopt the “euro” was made in 1999 but the concept of a single currency was established for the first time in 1949 by the European Movement (see Shore 2000:89).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/licensing.html> (06 March 2011).

<sup>4</sup> “In other words, he is a true European – through and through” (Die, Europhobe scum, *Guardian*, 6 April, 1999).

simply a product of a “fun-oriented industry”, i.e. entertainment for various Europeans, we understand his creation as a mechanism that attempts to contribute to the construction of a European supranational identity, belonging to a larger network of projects supported by European public policymakers that strive to produce a “European culture” and a “European identity”. We ask: What kind of a fantasy world has spawned Captain Euro? And more importantly: What kind of reality has been supported by this fantasy?<sup>5</sup> Finally, we pose the question: What kind of identification amongst European citizens is initiated by this fantasy? In trying to answer these questions, we grounded our interest in popular culture within the theoretical frameworks of the psychoanalytic approach and discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau (2007), Sara Ahmed (2004), Renata Salecl (1998) and Slavoj Žižek (1989, 2006).

### **CAPTAIN EURO COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS**

On the official website of Captain Euro, the first two comic book installments are accompanied by resumes, backgrounds, and biographical details of the two forces struggling over the future of Europe – Captain Euro versus the main villain, Dr. D. Vider; the good team versus the evil team; good versus evil in general. Of course, one has to have an excellent resume for the job of protector of Europe. Resumes are texts that guarantee, or at least indicate a possibility that the job will be done; a future is guaranteed by the past: past deeds, biographical details and recommendations. Captain Euro’s resume does not evoke any supernatural power. He does not apply for a job by promising something extraordinary, as does Superman. He cannot fly through space at the speed of light, break through the time

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<sup>5</sup> Here, we think of a Žižekian “fantasy”. According to Žižek, fantasy emerges as a support of what we call “reality”. It appears in exactly the place where the incompleteness of reality becomes evident –where imbalance is introduced. It is fantasy that constructs the frame enabling the subject to desire something, and it is through fantasy that the subject learns how to desire. So, fantasy in Žižek’s interpretation does not serve simply to fulfil the subject’s wishes; on the contrary “in the fantasy scene the desire is not ... ‘satisfied’, but constituted” (1989:118).

barrier or transfer himself to other epochs. He cannot fell an entire forest at supersonic speed, make lumber from the trees, or bore through mountains. Rather than him being imbued with supernatural powers, Captain Euro's battle against evil forces is based on knowledge. Throughout his resume there are references to knowledge, scientific-technological progress and the superiority of cultural heritage.

“RESUME: Born ADAM ANDROS – the only child of a famous European Ambassador and a professor of palaeontology. Travelling the world with his parents, Adam learned to cope with the adult social world from an early age. As a child, participation in an experimental language programme enabled Adam to become a polyglot.”<sup>6</sup>

Bringing forth citizens that can speak three or more European languages is one of the most important goals of EU administrators and policymakers. Since the motto of the EU is “unity in diversity”, knowledge of many different languages is seen as a kind of representation of European unity, a unity which respects all cultural differences but at the same time points to the fact that there is something underlining all of these differences. It is something all Europeans can share – a common European heritage, a shared history which produced values such as freedom, democracy, equality, justice and solidarity. These values are often seen as a product of Europe's intellectual past, something which the EU should build on in order to secure a harmonious co-existence of different groups of people.<sup>7</sup> And it is exactly this task that Adam, who took on the identity of Captain Euro, wants to accomplish:

“Captain Euro has taken a difficult vow: ‘To use, wherever possible, intellect, culture and logic – not violence – to take control of difficult

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/goodies.com> (18 February 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, De Clercq reporting in 1993, or Romano Prodi's speech in 2002 when he appointed a group of intellectuals to look into the shared spiritual, religious and cultural values that would continue to drive the process of European integration (available on [http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission\\_1999\\_2004/prodi/group/michalski\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_1999_2004/prodi/group/michalski_en.htm) (17 August 2008), or José Manuel Barroso's speech “Europe and Culture” (available on <http://www.ifa.de/en/info/dossiers/auswaertige-kulturpolitik-in-europa/culture-report-progress-europe/> (9 January 2009)).

criminal situations.’ Captain Euro is a diplomatic hero – the symbol of European unity and values.”<sup>8</sup>

In his resume, under special skills, we learn that besides knowing many languages, Captain Euro as Adam Andros was a first-class student of Information Technology, and that he “combines his acquired language and technology skills with his international “savoir fair” and his natural investigative curiosity, to protect Europe and carry Europe’s message of goodwill around the world”.<sup>9</sup>

Another important area in which EU officials have vested much effort with the goal of establishing a European identity is education with a European dimension, that is, an emphasis on scientific-technological progress. Special focus is given to the promotion of intercultural dialogue, where “open-mindedness” should serve as a basis for economic, political and cultural progress. In order to ensure communication between various European peoples, the EU has invested largely in the development of information technology. Computers, mobile phones, the internet, and high-speed digital delivery systems are all seen as means towards the development of better networks, better communication and better understanding, not just internally but also externally. Therefore, it is not surprising that Captain Euro embodies these technologies and masters these skills.

In his fight against the evil threatening Europe, Captain Euro is not alone. He has a team. This team expands those values already represented by Captain Euro: it broadens knowledge of languages, from contemporary to ancient, deepens awareness of the environment, widens the scope of exploration to outer spheres, and so on. Each member of the team has his/her sphere, and these apply to the entire globe. Donna Eden, known as Europa, is an archaeologist and an expert in ancient written languages. She combines “her expertise in the Gaea theory and her love of the natural world to become a committed environmentalist”. Hers is the Environmental Sphere.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/goodies.htm> (06 March 2011).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/goodies.htm> (06 March 2011).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/goodies.htm> (18 February 2011).

We also learn from her resume that she led a university expedition to investigate the Atlantis myth, that she is an expert scuba diver and oceanographer and that she enjoys athletic activities – therefore she covers the Sports Sphere as well. And even though it is not mentioned in her resume, we are led to believe that her relationship with Captain Euro is not strictly professional – there are implications that Europa and Euro, feminine and masculine, are in some kind of romantic relationship. But, as we will discuss in the next section of this essay, this possible relationship is problematic, because Captain Euro, as any other comic book superhero, has some structural problems that hinder his growth, including his consumption of love.

As we have already mentioned, knowledge, science, technology and culture are all considered to be interwoven in the EU, so other members of Captain Euro's team serve to further develop this allegorical narrative: Erik, "once a test pilot for aircraft and space vehicle research", is in charge of the Space Sphere; Helen, a proud winner of Olympic Gold in gymnastics, had a chance as a young gymnast "to visit, and gain an insight into many different communities", and therefore she "developed an impressive knowledge and appreciation of the diversity of all the European cultures" – she is in charge of the Knowledge Sphere; Marcus, a scientist who invented holographic transmission technology, which allows him to transmit 3-D images, is in charge of all the gadgetry – his is responsible for the the Hi-tech Sphere; Lupo, a grey European wolf found in the Eastern Carpathian forests, is Captain Euro's long lasting friend who can instantly "understand who is friend or foe"; Pythagoras, the most advanced computer, named after an ancient Greek philosopher, projects itself in the form of Pythagoras dipped in blue chrome.

Although there is an emphasis on knowledge, cosmopolitanism, and the pursuit of non-violence through diplomacy, Captain Euro and his team, nevertheless, are confronted with villains, with baddies, with evil. But who are the "baddies", the villains? Who are the enemies of Europe? The main villain is Dr. D. Vider who is also well educated and a former financier (Captain Euro needs a worthy opponent). Just as there are resumes of good, so there are resumes of evil. Just as all "good" resumes offer information and guarantees that the character in question can perform something well,

the evil resumes are written in a way that promises strong performance with an opposite objective. Dr. D. Vider's resume confirms his evil excellence.

He is a ruthless speculator, a collector of ancient curiosities, and "used to making money no matter if it might involve the suffering of others".<sup>11</sup> He threatens the very foundation of pan-European political architecture, love for Europe as a patria, by stealing its most valuable cultural icons – works of art (in one episode he steals a Van Gogh painting). He also touches the primal fear of the European ideal: fear of disintegration; he hopes to divide the European Union so that he can more easily conquer it. "He manages a holding company, DIVIDEX, controlling hundreds of different businesses across Europe and beyond".<sup>12</sup> Europe's cultural heritage and works of art, accumulated over centuries and representing Europe's identity, are under constant threat by Dr. D. Vider:

"Dr. D. Vider will stop at nothing to get his hands on the most collectible rarities, even if they belong to others. He especially covets the STAR OF EUROPE, kept from him by CAPTAIN EURO at their very first encounter and now under guard by the TWELVE STARS EURO TEAM."<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting that unlike numerous baddies of other comic books or films (as for example in the *James Bond* series) who are identified as coming from the East, the Orient, or the communist bloc beyond the Iron Curtain, Dr. D. Vider comes from within. His resume is an inversion of Captain Euro's resume – a downward spiral of core values. In addition, he is a greedy businessman, a ruthless multi-millionaire, who makes others suffer for his own profit.

"Banned and ostracised from the financial world for unprofessional conduct he managed to escape arrest despite his involvement in financial scandal."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/baddies.htm> (18 February 2011).

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/baddies.html> (18 February 2011).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/baddies.htm> (18 February 2011).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/baddies.html> (18 February 2011).

This could imply that Europe is developing a system in which tycoons, moguls, and creepy and greedy entrepreneurs like Dr. D. Vider, are not welcome.

But the evil Dr. D. Vider is not alone. Like Capitan Euro, he also has his team – his evil team. The team, working towards the establishment of an evil empire, includes: Junior Vider, his only child, “the sole heir to the evil empire”, an expert in the art of hypnosis and subliminal persuasion, a sociopath who drives the sportiest of European cars; Mala Glamora, with a showbiz background, an expert in disguising herself “not just with her clothes, but also adopting different personalities”, secretly in love with Captain Euro; Ninot, a ventriloquist who hides in total anonymity, also an inventor of special gadgets – some of them lethal; the twins Castor and Pollux that can pilot vehicles of any description; Pappagallo, a rare species of parrot, a smart-talking bird who is trained to listen and repeat conversations.

The evil empire hence embodies all sorts of tricks and illusions; members of the evil team are prone to deceiving, spreading illusions, misinformation, falseness – everything that can confuse and discourage. They are a kind of anti-Enlightenment enterprise which haunts official Europe. If we think about “baddies” and “goodies” in terms of binary oppositions – in classic comic book superhero narratives there is always an opposition between good and evil – we can see a clear opposition of values representing Captain Euro and his team and those representing Dr. D. Vider and his team:



<b>Captain Euro and his team</b>	<b>Dr. D. Vider and his team</b>
Good	Evil
Honesty	Dishonesty
Knowledge	Deception
Truth	Illusion
Cohesion	Fragmentation
Unification	Dissolution
Solidarity	Having no compassion or pity
Respect	No respect
Justice	Opportunism
Reliability	Unreliability
Capitalism with a human face	Cruel accumulation of capital
Generosity	Greed
Open-handed	Selfishness
Athleticism	Fashion-obsessed

These binary oppositions illustrate dilemmas of the unification of Europe; they address the complexities of the process of establishing a supranational identity which must co-exist alongside national and regional identities. The use of a series of binary oppositions is nothing new in popular narratives. Umberto Eco (1972:147) in his analysis of narrative structures in Ian Fleming's work (Superman, James Bond) argues that binary oppositions allow a limited number of permutations and interactions; they are immediate and universal and from the beginning they set events in motion. Captain Euro and Dr. D. Vider's opposition is not one of strong versus weak, as both of them are well-educated, and both powerful in their own way. Both of them represent knowledge, but Captain Euro uses his knowledge only for a good end while Dr. D. Vider uses his knowledge opportunistically. Though his name is the same as the European common currency, Captain Euro does not represent the basis of European unity, that is, European economy; on the contrary, his fictional character is designed to represent the cultural values of Europe, values which are seen by European officials as the driving force behind the construction of a "European

identity”.<sup>15</sup> His costume features elements of the European Union flag – his jacket is blue with two emblems: (1) a circle of twelve stars; (2) a five-pointed yellow star with the “E” of Europe at its centre. Both of these emblems symbolise perfection and strength through unity. He is a polyglot and his knowledge of information technology establishes his character as a symbol of Europe. He commands advanced communication skills and he respects diversity underlined by common values which have emerged as a result of European history (common heritage rooted in the past), but are in a constant process of improvement (European added value).

Captain Euro’s overall image and style stand in clear opposition to those of Dr. D. Vider, who, as we know by now, represents monstrosity, selfishness and greed, and is dressed in black, symbolizing evil forces in general. This rigid binary structure (Captain Euro/GOOD and Dr. D. Vider/BAD) is far from neutral: the positive character with whom readers are supposed to identify always uses the prefix EURO to name his gadgets – Eurocar, Eurosub, Euroracer. Hence, universal values such as freedom and justice carry a clear prefix too. The opposing element of the structure, even though it has its origins within European boundaries (Dr. D. Vider), is not universal in the same way as Captain Euro. Hence, in some episodes Captain Euro fights against other evil forces such as, for example, the Taliban in Afghanistan. This aspect makes Captain Euro an interesting object of analysis because while the narrative surrounding him relies on

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<sup>15</sup> Already in the 1980s, Jacques Delors (then the President of the European Commission) had recognised “culture” as an important element in the development of a common European market. His claim that, “You don’t fall in love with a common market; you need something else” (Delors, quoted in Stavrakakis 2005), marked the moment in which new symbols of Europeaness were created. These included the flag, the European anthem and a common design for passports. In addition, a range of initiatives promoting cultural and educational cooperation between member-states was established. The most significant symbol of unification was certainly the “euro” as a European common currency. But the “euro” was supposed to be more than just a currency. As French Finance Minister Laurent Fabius said: “Thanks to the euro, our pockets will soon hold solid evidence of a European identity. We need to build on this, and make the euro more than a currency and Europe more than a territory...” (*The Financial Times*, London, July 24, 2000). In this context, it is not surprising that Captain Euro, a fictional character designed in 1999, represents this concern with European culture and identity (see Božić-Vrbančić 2009, 2010).

the simplicity of binary oppositions, as with many other comic books on superheroes, it also invites the reader to identify not just with the European supranational identity but with Europe as a global superpower. In other words, questions of identity offered by Captain Euro's narrative deserve additional analysis in respect to issues of time and space for this fictional character.

### **CAPTAIN EURO AND COMIC BOOK SUPERHEROES (PROBLEM OF TIME AND SPACE)**

Captain Euro's story is in many ways similar to that of Clark Kent, who, according to Eco (1972:108), personifies the average reader, complex-ridden (wearing glasses – bad eyesight, being shy, unconfident....) and disliked by others, who through the process of self-identification with Superman secretly feeds the hope that one day, from the slough of his actual personality, there can spring a superman who is capable of redeeming years of mediocre existence. Likewise, Captain Euro is designed for the youth from various parts of Europe that may dream that one day they will join those who work in European institutions (super-bureaucracy), those who, like Captain Euro, master several languages and many other skills. The special focus on “young Europeans” is not incidental. As Sara Ahmed (2004:129) argues, the building of a new community, in this case, the European community, is often imagined in the form of the future generation who will acquire the features of the ideal national (in this case supranational) subject. The ideal future European is imagined as somebody who will be educated through European student exchange programmes (like Erasmus), one who speaks three or more European languages, is mobile, and ready to travel throughout Europe.

In the case of Superman, Eco (1972) defines a paradox in Superman's narrative, which is at the same time mythic and novelistic. He describes Superman's almost irresolvable position: he must be an archetype, the totality of certain collective aspirations, and therefore he necessarily becomes immobilised in an emblematic and fixed nature which renders him easily recognisable. He is in “the worrisome narrative situation of being a hero without an adversary and therefore without the possibility of any

development” (Eco 1972:153). In addition to this, his episodic adventures reappear weekly, in short episodes in which a particular narrative is represented, developed and resolved. Here Eco almost expresses sympathy for Superman and his creators: “Aesthetically and commercially deprived of the possibility of narrative development, Superman gives serious problems to his script writers” (1972:153).

The narrative dilemma of serialized fiction is closed because it is designed to elicit a predetermined response. Superman cannot “consume himself”, since a myth is “inconsumable”. The hero of the classical myth became “inconsumable” precisely because he was already “consumed” in some exemplary action. The battle against monolithic evil is never-ending, his actions do not consume time, he

“accomplishes a given job ... and at this point the story ends. ... If [the story] took Superman up again at the point where he left off, he would have taken a step toward death” (Eco 1972:153).

Superman, then, must remain “inconsumable” and at the same time be “consumed” according to the ways of everyday life. He possesses the characteristics of timeless myth, but is accepted only because his activities take place in our human and everyday world. His mundane job is the kind of job we all are familiar with. We can add here that the superhero’s sublime body is inconsumable insofar as it is partly consumed, or, in other words, it is consumed endlessly, as in mass popular culture.

Therefore, nothing can happen in a Superman tale which advances the hero along his life-path: he cannot marry, reproduce or grow old, because this would tie him in to biological cycles, to the contingency of everyday life, in the novelistic narrative. For the same reason Captain Euro does not have a love affair with Europa, and even if this love were to be openly recounted, it would never be consummated. Some scholars (see for example Medhurst 1991:150, or Beatty 2000:17) remark on the consistently homosexual nature of characters like Superman or Batman. What these authors miss is the point that the sexual difference does not lie in the dichotomy the sexes, but in that of the sexual and asexual. To put it in the terms of Laclau’s (2007) logic of hegemony, sexual difference is the

Real of an antagonism<sup>16</sup>, since in it, the external difference (between sexual and asexual) is mapped onto the internal difference between the two sexes. Hence beyond the “impossible” fusion of mythic and novelistic narrative, postmodern social fantasy very often finds a solution to this deadlock in a vision of the asexual angelic entity – from Superman and Captain Euro to a vision of humanity that collectively decides to replace itself with genetically modified asexual humanoids in order to avoid the deadlock of sexuality.

If we think about sexual difference as the Real of an antagonism, we can say that Captain Euro’s sexuality “is the Real that has to be left out for the story” (Salecl 1998:61) in order to make it possible at all – in order for Captain Euro to “protect Europe from evil forces and spread European values all around the world”.<sup>17</sup> Or in other words, prior to sexual difference there is no proper narrative, or no narrative whatsoever; or the narrative is enclosed in a mythic time of constant repetition. In order to tell the story, something unpredictable must happen, a chance opportunity, a contingency to break out of the enchanting circularity of time. Excess to *jouissance* through narrative embodies, therefore, different concepts – mythic and novelistic. Both of these concepts ground narratives that construct any

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<sup>16</sup> For Laclau (1985, 2007) antagonism is the limit of social order, it is “the limit of all objectivity”, the “impossibility of any stable difference”, it is “the negation of a given order”. This limit of the social is not external to it, it is given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence. In other words, antagonism functions as the Lacanian Real. According to Žižek (1989:180), for Lacan the Real is a phase of the subject before or “after” being written and overwritten with signifiers, or it is an impediment, an inherent obstacle in signification. The Real is something that has not yet been symbolised; it resists symbolisation and yet is created by the symbolic. The Real is sacrificed when the subject enters the symbolic. Through the process of identification, the subject seeks the fullness of her or his identity in the symbolic (the world of words), but this fullness which the subject seeks is impossible since by entering into the symbolic the subject sacrifices an immediate access to the Real (unity, wholeness). The subject thus becomes alienated and this “alienation constitutes the subject as such” (Žižek 1989:170). In Lacan, this lack of the Real is the lack of a pre-symbolic, real enjoyment - a lack of *jouissance*. The sacrifice of *jouissance* causes the desire for it, and in that context, it becomes posited as an external object, which remains desirable but still impossible.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.captaineuro.com/goodies.htm> (18 February 2011).

kind of a community. Therefore, we can say that Captain Euro's position, like other comic book superheroes' positions, mirrors not only the problem of serialised fiction as described by Eco, but points to the fundamental ambiguity of narratives that ground any kind of community.

For Captain Euro and Superman there is no possibility of erotic satisfaction. Rather, they find pleasure in solving a problem in the nick of time, at the last moment. They cannot change, or reproduce. Their actions are strung together in an infinite series, a series that can be extended as long as one likes, with no limits. They are doubles who resemble everyday life, but at the same time belong to myths. In other words, their narrative resembles the paradox of time described by Benedict Anderson (1991) in his work on nations as imaginary communities.<sup>18</sup> He discusses on the one hand an empty, homogenous time emerging with print and capitalism, run by a clock and a calendar (embodied in simultaneous reading of the newspaper); and, on other hand, a mythic past of origin, of belonging. These two notions of time incite narration, but that narration is at the same time a result of a fundamental split that is the base of any community. Superheroes, then, balance the same narrative paradox: a chance and homeostasis, the novelistic and mythic time.<sup>19</sup>

The paradox of time cannot be "solved" without taking into consideration the notion of space. From the very beginning of the Captain Euro narrative we have a strong spatial iconography. The emphasis is on space rather than time and from the very first episode on the official website

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<sup>18</sup> Anderson's (1991) argument is that all ideas of community are "imaginary" and that two forms of imagining a community flowered in Europe in the eighteenth century: the novel and the newspaper, both contributing directly to the rise of national consciousness.

<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, Captain Euro represents the supranational level by subsuming different national cultures under the same "common heritage" (going as far back as ancient Greece and Rome). On the other hand, he represents the supranational level as a sum of different cultures, a total which enriches each individual culture, be it regional or national. The first presupposes a fantasy of culture which is rooted in the past, culture that is assumed to be static and fixed, something that can be displayed in the present. The second offers a fantasy of the supranation as a process, where the emphasis is on the fact that Europe *is* in the making, in the process of becoming a "superpower" in order to protect "the world from the evil forces".

we can follow this expansion of space – spatial metaphors – that saturate the narrative. The Captain Euro story opens with a view of the earth, our bluish planet seen from a satellite, with a caption telling us that, “we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” and that “the world is changing more rapidly than ever before.”<sup>20</sup> As we look at this tiny planet in the Milky Way we learn that “old structures are disappearing and new ones taking their place”. It is clear that this change in structures refers to the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism, Europe’s enlargement – the fervent years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the era of globalisation. This new situation, besides offering many opportunities, also brings new uncertainties. The view of the planet certainly corresponds with “uncertainties” related to global warming, climate change, the increase of pollution.... All these suggest how old national boundaries and divisions are useless and outmoded. The next frame brings us comfort by showing the seat of a new power (supposedly capable of solving all problems). “Unity in diversity” power radiates in circles from the centre to the periphery; the centre is in Brussels. Europe is shown without borders, without the hindrance presented by the axiomatic and hegemonic grip that the nation-states hold over their territories – Europe is a vast territory, an open space in which Captain Europe and his team operate. This is confirmed by a caption:

“In this climate of constant change, The European union, the union of prosperity and innovation, has emerged as a global superpower. The twelve star organisation has been set up to defend the security of Europe and uphold the values of union. The security and values of Europe are protected from the top secret Atomium building in which one brave man maintains perpetual vigilance.”<sup>21</sup>

Our superhero, Captain Euro lives here, in the Atomium building<sup>22</sup>; his adobe is cold, bluish, crystalline, almost like Superman’s Krypton. From

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.captaineuro.com/anim\\_adv\\_origi.htm](http://www.captaineuro.com/anim_adv_origi.htm) (18 February 2011).

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/1999/apr/06/features11.g21>.

<sup>22</sup> “The Atomium is an extraordinary building in Brussels that consists of nine large spheres connected by tubes in a way that mimics the atomic structure of an iron crystal. It was constructed for the World’s Fair of 1958, and left standing after the fair because it was so greatly appreciated” (see <http://www.dowcorning.com/content/publishedlit/62-1439-01.pdf>). (28. June 2011).

here he monitors the world. On his head he bears a five-pointed yellow star, “the shining symbol of strength through unity”. Captain Euro and his team spread the European message with them wherever they go. “Danger lurks everywhere. A threat of terrorism is omnipresent. They defend Europe by the air, sea and land, and even space.” In the first episode there is a bomb in the depth of the oceans that must be diffused. After successful action, we see a European jet and the Atomium building with the European flag in the background, assuring us of the strength behind Captain Euro, or what he represents.

Images of the bluish planet, the underwater world and submarines, and jets flying in the air, all suggest the importance of space. In adventure-time the link between space and time is not organic but purely technical. The contingency that governs events - the protagonists’ attempts to overcome hindrances and obstacles - is inseparably tied up with space, measured primarily by distance on the one hand and by proximity on the other. Superman travels through space at the speed of light, sometimes even faster; Captain Euro, like James Bond, uses different gadgets, as well as submarines and aeroplanes, to chase Dr. D. Vider over the entire planet Earth. In spite of the fact that we are immersed in the diversity of the geographical locations, none of these locations redirect the narrative; Captain Euro has no organic ties or relationship with the landscape, there is no description of the respective site as a whole. Primacy is given to Captain Euro’s chance to fix the disorder, and disorder can happen anywhere, since the evil team (Dr. D. Vider’s team) acts globally. Captain Euro must prevent this. In doing so, he must set up the powerful panopticon gaze that controls the whole world. This motif of control is justified by the story of the progress of the sciences. In the Atomium building itself everything is neatly divided and classified – there are nine interconnected spheres, each of which serves a specific function: the Conference Sphere, the Control Sphere, the Hi Tech Sphere, the Environmental Sphere, the Space Sphere, the Cyber Sphere, the Media Sphere, the Sport Sphere, and the Knowledge Sphere. It is suggested that no national power can hold that together. The power must be supranational, a “global superpower”. The question is: which forms of citizen identification are initiated by this fantasy frame of a global superpower?



## TIME, SPACE AND IMPERIAL POWER

In their book *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) envisage a new kind of Empire, an Empire unlike any previous Empire, based on the logic of late capitalism. They argue that everything is prepared for the new Empire: colonial regimes have been overthrown, the Iron Curtain has fallen and the market economy has spread everywhere. The new Empire is born out of globalisation; it develops a new form of supranational, that is, worldwide, sovereignty which cannot be contained in any nation-state. However, the Empire presents itself as eternal, outside of history, with an omnipotent global power (biopower)<sup>23</sup> that can produce and deconstruct the world. The Imperial machine as a decentralised and deterritorializing apparatus swallows all localities with its open, expanding frontiers. The old divisions between the First World, the Second World and the Third World gradually implode, collapse. The transformation of industrial work into communicative, virtual economies enables the smooth flow of capital, empowered by biopolitical production, the production of social life itself, with blurring boundaries between economy, culture and politics.

This imperial power dissected in Hardt and Negri's *Empire* parallels, to some degree, the world of our superhero Captain Euro. In his world,

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<sup>23</sup> Hardt and Negri use and develop Foucault's concept of biopower. Foucault argues that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "disciplinary power" was combined with "regulation" and these two poles of power formed what he termed "biopower". While disciplinary power is "centred on the body as a "machine", regularisation is concerned with "the species body", with "global mass". Thus, biopower is "organised around the management of life": "power would no longer be dealing with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body" (Foucault 1998:139). According to Hardt and Negri, "when power becomes entirely biopolitical, the whole social body is comprised by power's machine and developed in its virtuality... Society, subsumed within a power that reaches down to the ganglia of the social structure and its processes of development, reacts like a single body. Power is thus expressed as a control that extends throughout the depths of the consciousnesses and bodies of the population – and at the same time across the entirety of social relations... The paradox of a power – while it unifies and envelops within itself every element of social life..., at that very moment reveals a new context, a new milieu of maximum plurality and uncontainable singularization – a milieu of the event. These conceptions of the society of control and biopower describe central aspects of the concept of Empire" (2000:25).

there is first of all an everlasting, eternal present time. Just as Superman, he never changes, never matures, only rushes from one adventure to another; the Empire may have some problems but never something that will derail the present. Like Superman, he lives in episodes, in the time of telling, in crystalline constructions of eternal repetitions, with short flashbacks, with the illusion that there has been a flow of time, that something indeed has happened.

According to Eco (1972), this disintegration of temporality tends to furnish the reader with imaginative models that make him/her capable of accepting the illusion of a continuous present. In Captain Euro, this paradox of time enables the invention of visual imaginings of future Europe, in which longing for epic national pasts, traces of mythic time, are engineered to move the “European subjects” to feel stronger bonds with their supranational structure. Captain Euro fights the evil forces in the continuous present, he moves from one adventure to another one, but he cannot win entirely, he cannot taste the final victory (as this would symbolise his death). Just as the final victory would be the end of a serialised fiction, it would be the end of the illusion of a continuous present and possible solutions to problems. In other words, his endless fight against evil forces relentlessly perpetuates just one option, one vision of the future, in which Europe as a superpower protects the world.

This social fantasy represents cosmopolitanism as a “true European value”<sup>24</sup> that, in contrast to American power, represents itself as a “soft power”; it presupposes the dominance of its enlightenment role over a brute force of conversion. In recent debates on visions of Europe, cosmopolitanism as a value has replaced multiculturalism, often seen as a model that has failed and is possibly even dangerous in the age of terrorism.<sup>25</sup> A cosmopolite, according to European policymakers, is the most desirable citizen of Europe. She/he presents a much more secure, much more desirable identity, because of her/his smooth integration (multiculturalism is seen as a concept

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<sup>24</sup> See Beck 2006.

<sup>25</sup> See “Merkel says German multicultural society has failed”. *BBC World News*, 17.10.2010; “Nicolas Sarkozy declares multiculturalism has failed”. *The Telegraph*, 01.03.2011; “U.K. Prime Minister: Multiculturalism has failed”. *Fox Nation*, 05.02.2011.

that failed to integrate immigrants), and because of her/his openness to the global processes. Cosmos and polis, eternal peace, an overall inclusion – is the European global message.

Captain Euro is in a way cosmopolitan, a consumer of the world he wanders in, like a post-modern traveller open to otherness in the form of magnificent tourist sites and different gastronomic pleasures. While multiculturalism is seen as preserving an outmoded concept of “either/or”, according to Beck (2006), cosmopolitanism includes both; cosmopolitanism is the imperial power of inclusion, with no outside. Cosmopolitanism presupposes that the Other will sooner or later accept European values, because European values embrace the whole of humanity. In this context, the Other is fixed, immobile, someone in a limbo, with only one route of escape – to become a cosmopolite (European).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we argued that Captain Euro embodies European Imperial desire, a Eurocentric dream. Captain Euro is part of a large network of projects established by European public policymakers striving to produce European culture. His creation is less motivated by a need to promote so-called “European values” and “cosmopolitanism”, but rather to construct a European public and a European identity. However, he represents ambiguities which surround concepts of European culture and identity, as well as problems of Eurocentrism. In *The Parallax View*, Žižek claims that Eurocentrism

“relies on too narrow a definition of what is human, a definition that secretly excludes non Europeans as ‘not fully human’. ...the paradox is that every normative determination of the ‘human’ is possible only against an impenetrable ground of ‘inhuman’, of something which remains opaque and resists inclusion in any narrative reconstitution of what counts as ‘human’ ...in other words, the very attempt to posit the Human as ‘absolute subject’ dehumanizes it” (2006:111).

Consequently, the question of Europe as a supranational, cosmopolitan entity is ultimately tested in relation to various forms of otherness (not

only the Other embodied in immigrants, but the Other as, e.g., a natural catastrophe, and so on). Because of this, Captain Euro's significance surpasses simple reader/viewer identification with a superhero. He is supranational Homo European, he is someone who no longer feels a deep emotional attachment to the nation-state and whose old parochial loyalties and sense of belonging have been re-directed towards Europe as a global superpower, as an Empire. His readers and viewers should be immersed in an illusion of a continuous present, and should consequently be fascinated by his fetishistic body; the body that does not grow old, or change; the body that resembles the European monetary currency.

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### CAPTAIN EURO: VRIJEME, PROSTOR I IMPERIJALNA MOĆ

Captain Euro je mrežni strip kreiran 1999. godine. Kreirala ga je britanska kompanija “Twelve Stars Corporate Vision Strategists” po narudžbi Europskog parlamenta i Europske komisije. Cilj ovog rada je analizirati ulogu popularne kulture u procesu konstruiranja europskog identiteta. U središtu takve analize je superheroj Captain Euro.

**Ključne riječi:** nadnacionalni europski identitet, popularna kultura, strip, ideološka fantazija europskog imperijalizma, pitanje prostora i vremena